



The Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Trumpeter

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www.MRVAC.org

March & April 2017

Anne Hanley, articles editor
Greg Burnes, field trips editor

Chip Notes

by Greg Burnes, MRVAC President

Spring is just around the corner and it's time to get ready for a great birding summer. MRVAC is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year and we are planning a celebration on June 22nd. We are meeting at the refuge for an exciting presentation by Neil Wingert. In 2016 Neil and his wife celebrated his retirement by taking a round-the-world birding trip. He has a number of spectacular pictures to share along with many great stories. We will also be sponsoring a bird walk at the refuge, having our wonderful pot-luck dinner with some cake, and maybe offering some door prizes (still working on that one). I know it seems like it's a long way off, but circle June 22 on your calendar. More details to come. 50 Years! Wahoo!!!

The board wants to thank all of you that contributed your time and money to our 2016 fund raising events. On Give-To-The-Max day, despite some technical difficulties, we collected over \$2,000. And, at our holiday auction we had a lot of fun and collected over \$3,000. These dollars, combined with our memberships and other generous contributions have provided the chapter with grant money to support educational and conservation projects. So, if you know of a worthy cause that is doing great work but could use some support, point them to our website or have them email me at gburnes@comcast.net. The board will be considering grant requests in April and May.

Tracy Albinson, our wonderful MRVAC volunteer that has maintained the MRVAC website for many years, is working on an incredible web upgrade. It provides a platform to get more real-time news on-line and it will be an excellent source for keeping up with birding and conservation news and activities. She is also working on having the site provide hot birding spots in the local area with descriptions and maps, adding a wealth of pictures and much more. Look for more news in March. Thanks everyone for a great 2016 and a bright 2017. See you on the birding trail!!!

Special Presentations March and April

Free & Open to the Public

Changing the Future for Endangered Species

Thursday March 23 @ 7:30 pm

Presented by Dr. Onnie Byers, Chair
IUCN SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group

CBSG is a global network of conservation professionals headquartered in Minnesota, dedicated to saving threatened species by increasing the effectiveness of conservation efforts worldwide. Hear about mammals from the coastal scrublands of Tasmania, amphibians from a unique gorge in Tanzania, birds from the forests of Japan, and plants from the rocky caves of Bermuda – stories that illustrate ways in which our commitment to science, collaboration and neutral facilitation has helped improve the status of threatened species in the wild by helping the people already working to conserve a species come to agreement on what needs to be done to succeed..

Spark Birds

Thursday, April 27 @ 7:30 pm

Presented by Al Batt-storyteller, writer and humorist

What in the world is a spark bird? What is your spark bird? Why is it your spark bird? Can you trade spark birds with your friends? Al Batt will endeavor to answer your spark bird questions.

These details are for both meetings –

When: Please join us from **7:00-7:30 pm** to socialize over cookies. A brief business meeting and the featured speaker begin at **7:30 pm**. The meeting will conclude before 9:00 pm.

Where: Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center 3815 American Blvd E, Bloomington. Enter through the staff door in the middle of the building. From Hwy 494 to 34th Ave – S to American Blvd; turn left and go 2 blocks. Center will be on your right. Also accessible via the Hiawatha Light Rail line; exit at the American Blvd. stop.

MRVAC and Refuge News

Chip Notes Too!

Bob Janssen, MRVAC Board Member

I leave my house at 3:40 A.M., it is a "beautiful" January morning in Minnesota, January 15, 2017 to be exact. I am off on my favorite winter birding adventure in Minnesota, the seeking of a Varied Thrush in a new county, this time in a very special county. Most of my Minnesota birders know me as a compulsive county list keeper, they are correct. I am addicted to finding new county birds in the state which helps me keep track of the distribution of Minnesota birds, another favorite activity of mine.

Now back to my adventure to find a Varied Thrush in a new Minnesota county. As I head north on I-35 the temperature is falling. By the time I reach Cloquet it is well below zero, 9 degrees below to be exact, but the skies are clear and there is little or no wind. Wind is one of the worst things for birding, in my opinion, so I am pleased with a windless day so far. I head north on Highway 53 through Virginia and reach one of my favorite towns in Minnesota, Cook. I get gas and see my first birds of the day a Common Raven and an American Crow looking for food (hand-outs?). I always try and use the full names of birds so people are aware of them. As I continue north on 53 the temperature is on the rise, unusual for this time of year. I reach the Koochiching County line at 8:45 A.M.

Koochiching County is special to me, it is Minnesota's second largest county at 3,173 square miles. It is difficult to build a big bird list in "Kooch", as many people call it, because the habitat is so uniform, cutover, second growth forests, lack of lakes and much of it inaccessible plus being 300 miles from the Twin Cities. It is my lowest county list-wise at 220 species so any time I might be able to add a species to the list is a special event for me and now to have the possibility of adding a special species, the Varied Thrush, is a county lister's dream. It is 9:20 A.M. and I arrive, 293 miles later, at the MacDonald's in International Falls where I am to meet Al Meadows who will take me to the Varied Thrush location. Al is one of Minnesota's best bird photographers. The temperature is near 20 degrees, just great for the "ice-box" city in Minnesota.

Al seems somewhat upset when he arrives, we exchange greetings and he says he has found out that the man whose house we are going to has a bad case of the flu. My "heart" drops to my stomach, all this way and now we can't go look for the thrush. Al relieves my anxiety when he says "I will take you to the home but I won't go in because I don't want to get the flu, I am going to Panama in a couple of days and I don't want to get sick".

We drive through downtown International Falls and to a residential area along the Rainey River. I am prepared to wait for hours if necessary to see the thrush at the bird feeder. We drive in the driveway and I see a man in the window motioning for us to come in, Al says "I will stay in the car". I go into the house and meet a gentleman who seems very healthy, there is no introduction. All he says is that "the thrush is in the tree". He leads me to a big window overlooking the river and there in the tree is a beautiful female Varied Thrush. I watch the bird for 5-10 minutes as it feeds at the feeder. I thank the gentleman and go back to my car and Al is just leaving, he doesn't want to get any closer to the flu "bug".

I decide to head for Grand Rapids to look for a Curve-billed Thrasher that has been coming to a feeder in a residential area of Grand Rapids. It is shortly afternoon when I arrived after a neat ride through wild Koochiching County along Highway 6. I saw Gray Jays and White-winged Crossbills plus 22 Pine Grosbeaks feeding in a crab apple tree in Big Falls. Arriving at the spot in Grand Rapids, I find three of my favorite county listers present looking for the thrasher. Have they seen the bird I ask, "no and we have been here since sunrise". To make a long story short we all wait another four hours and the bird never puts in an appearance. We had great "bird" conversation but no bird, the trials and tribulations of birding! I finally decide to leave, dejected but happy with the Varied Thrush.

I arrive back home 594 miles later, tired but thankful that the roads were in great condition and that I had no problems. The lack of a Curve-billed Thrasher, there are only four other records for the state, is disappointing but to "bat 500" on a birding trip isn't all that bad.

Prayer Walk Held at MVNW Refuge

Blessing and praying for the land and waters while taking into account its human history; Wailing Women Worldwide, a Christian organization with deep roots from the Hebrew culture, led a prayer walk at several sites including the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Women in attendance came in from as far away as Nigeria to walk the land and waterways of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers along with local Dakota people in prayer and blessing. The aboriginal honoring and protocol of host people is of great importance to the Wailing Women organization.



MRVAC News, Continued

Bird-a-Thon Challenge

Submitted by Bob Williams, Treasurer

2017 marks the 50th Anniversary of the incorporation of our chapter. That makes this year's Birdathon a special event. Last year we raised almost \$3,000 so it may be a tough act to follow but if we all pitch in we can do it. Those of you who plan to go birding to raise money should choose a day between May 1st and May 15th. You can go birding anywhere in the world on that day. Sponsors usually make their pledges as a flat amount or on a per bird basis, so the more species you identify, the more money you can raise. You don't have to go birding alone. The more eyes and ears you have the better. You can start at 12:01am and bird until 11:59pm if you have the stamina. The funds that we raise with our Birdathon will be used to fund grant requests that are submitted to us. In the past these have included grants to local nature centers and schools, to the MN Arboretum, to the Audubon Center of the North Woods and the MN Valley NWR. Most of our grants support educational efforts directed at children.

Here are a few simple tips:

1. Don't be afraid to ask! Most people are reluctant to ask for donations, but I am always surprised at how many people are willing to help, especially when they understand what the money will be used for. Be sure to tell them that it is our 50th anniversary.
2. Plan out your route! Pay attention to the weather and the latest reports on MOU, e-bird and Facebook. The best results are achieved if you can visit a variety of habitats on a nice day.
3. Tell your sponsors what you did! Most sponsors have some interest in what you are doing and will want to know what the highlights of your day were. This will help you in upcoming years to ask for repeat sponsorship.
4. Use a sponsorship form! Forms can be obtained from MRVAC.ORG or Bob Williams (see below for his contact info). This helps you to keep track of who your donors are and how much they have pledged.

All donations that you collect should be submitted to Bob Williams by June 1, 2017. You can contact him at 612-728-2232 or at bxwilliams@cbburnet.com. It is best to give the donations directly to Bob at one of the general meetings, but they also can be mailed to MRVAC at PO Box 20400, Bloomington, MN 55420. You don't need to sponsor a birder to donate; direct donations are welcomed as well! Let's mark our 50th anniversary by making this one of the most successful Birdathons of our recent history.

Excelsior Christmas Bird Count

Summary by Howard Towle & Bill Marengo

The 65th Excelsior CBC was held on Saturday, December 17, 2016 which turned out to be a snowy and very cold day. The weather certainly made things challenging for all. Numbers of birds were below average for almost all species. There were 52 species reported with a total count of 5,110 birds. This is well below our average of 57 species and average of 10,960 individuals from the past 25 years. But this is not a bad number considering the weather that was experienced.

Notable sightings included: a Belted Kingfisher observed by three parties all along the MN River (likely the same individual bird); eleven waterfowl species observed by Renner Anderson, Doug Kieser and the Blue Lake Crew, including a Black Duck and several Northern Shovelers; a Northern Harrier found by the same crew; two Townsend's Solitaires seen, one at Carver Park and the other at the Richard T. Anderson Park in Eden Prairie; a Red-shouldered Hawk found by Steve and Maria Duane, the only Red-winged Blackbirds of the count observed by Thomas Hautman along the shore of Rice Marsh Lake in Chanhassen; and a surprising flock of late Tundra Swans flying over residential Minnetonka.

There were birds that we would normally expect that did not appear: Pine Siskin, Common Mergansers, Ring-billed Gull and Common Redpoll. Other birds we typically see in greater numbers put on a poor showing: Purple Finches, Tree Sparrows, Bald Eagles. All-in-all, winter resident birds were either missing entirely or were in low numbers. The only Purple Finch for the entire area made an appearance at Barb and Denny Martin's feeder. On the continuing decline are Ring-necked Pheasants. Back in the 60s and 70s there were regular totals of over 100 birds; this year only three were found. House Sparrows are also on a steady, historical downward trend.

Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG)

CBSG's mission is to save threatened species by increasing the effectiveness of conservation efforts worldwide. They use scientifically sound, collaborative processes that bring together people with diverse perspectives and knowledge to catalyze positive conservation change, providing species conservation planning expertise various organizations. To learn more about Apple Valley based CBSG, visit their web site at <http://www.cbsg.org/> or attend the March 23 meeting (see page 1).



Conservation and Nature-Focused Learning

Please Save the Date! April 19

Minnesota Water Action Day

Make Your Voice Heard on Water Action Day

Water Action Day is happening on Wednesday, April 19, 2017 and it will be a great opportunity for Audubon members to come to the Capitol for the day and participate in advocacy meetings, as well as a rally with the larger community interested in water issues. Many other Audubon members from around the state will be there and a host of other conservation advocates will also be in attendance.

There will be a training in the morning on how to effectively advocate for the water issues that birds and people face in Minnesota and a rally in the Rotunda at 1 pm. Throughout the day, there will be events to learn how to be civically engaged and also, what to expect in meetings with elected officials. Watch for updates and more information on Audubon Minnesota's Facebook page and website.

If there are members that would be willing to travel to the state Capitol anytime this spring, Audubon Minnesota can help set up meetings with your legislators, attend the meetings with you, and help you through the entire process. This is an impactful way to voice your support for clean water and it can be fun, too! Please contact Molly Pederson if you are interested meeting with your legislator at the Capitol (mpederson@audubon.org)

Sustainability Film Series @ U of M

Follow the Sustainability Studies program on Facebook and Twitter to learn about upcoming films and activities.

Catching the Sun Thurs March 2, 2017 at 6:30 PM
Bell Museum Auditorium

Through the stories of workers and entrepreneurs in the U.S. and China, *Catching the Sun* captures the global race to lead the clean energy future.

The True Cost – Thurs April 5, 2017 at 6:00 PM
Northrop Best Buy Theater

This is a story about clothing. It's about the clothes we wear, the people who make them, and the impact the industry is having on our world. The price of clothing has been decreasing for decades, while the human and environmental costs have grown dramatically. *The True Cost* is a groundbreaking documentary film that asks us to consider, who really pays the price for our clothing?

The Year of Water

By Bryan Wood, Executive Director – Audubon Center of the North Woods

This is appropriately the *Year of Water* in Minnesota, and we are celebrating water at the Audubon Center of the North Woods. This fall we hosted the Smithsonian Institution's *WaterWays* as well as Minnesota's *We Are Water* exhibits to highlight how incredibly vital and important clean freshwater is to our and the planet's health. We had a great turnout with over 1,250 K-12 students and adults attending the exhibits.

Minnesota is fortunate to home to three major watersheds, we have more lakes than any other state in the lower 48, and we start off with clean water in every one of our lakes and rivers. This leaves us with a great responsibility to keep our water clean and show others how to do it right.

This summer we are offering three distinct *Road Scholar* adult programs focused on water. This May, our founding director Mike Link and his wife Kate Crowley, will be leading weeklong trips looking at spring flora and migrations from the Twin Cities to Winona along the great Mississippi River flyway. In June, July and September they will be leading week-long trips along sections of Lake Superior's Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan shorelines, sharing their vast knowledge and passion for Lake Superior and the area's natural and cultural history. Mike and Kate are the only husband-wife team to walk around Lake Superior, their knowledge and experience is unmatched.

This summer will also offer a chance to explore Minnesota's famed North Country via walking shoes, canoe paddle and motor boat. Douglas Wood will share his love of the Canoe Country and intimate connection to Sigurd Olson and Ernest Oberholtzer and their vast legacies protecting the beloved border waters while exploring the North Shore, Ely area, and Voyageurs National Park. As a writer, musician and the President of the Listening Point and Ernest Oberholtzer Foundations, Douglas Wood's intimate knowledge and connection will make the week a truly life-impacting experience. These programs offer the chance to experience, learn about and reflect on our amazing nearby water resources. If you would like to find out more information about any of these programs, visit our website at www.audubon-center.org, or at www.roadscholar.org.

Regional Events & Environmental Action

Salt Lake Birding Weekend 4-29-2017

Sponsored by MOU and MRVAC

If you're dreaming about spring and wanting to find migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, why not join the 42nd annual Salt Lake Birding Weekend? On Saturday April 29, 2017, volunteers will guide birders around Salt Lake, Big Stone Refuge, the lakes, wetlands and native prairies in Lac Qui Parle, Yellow Medicine and Big Stone counties. This event is free and open to all who are interested. No pre-registration is required. Last year over 100 birders found 117 different species of birds with an additional one on Friday and eight on Sunday for a total of 126. Friday and Sunday birding is on your own. Contact Ken or stop by Prairie Marsh Farm for more information on local sites. Information and map at <http://moumn.org/saltlake/>

Last year with temperatures in the upper 70's, high winds resulted in low numbers of shorebirds. The best birds found on Saturday were two American Avocets, one White-faced Ibis and one Willet at Meidd Lake, a Great-tailed Grackle, early Eastern Whip-poor-will and Chimney Swift, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Pileated Woodpecker (hard to find out west) and a Ferruginous Hawk. Lincoln's Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow and a single late Pine Siskin were found at Prairie Marsh Farm, the latter being unique in my records for the Salt Lake Bird count. Later as the winds died down we found a flock of 300 shorebirds at Salt Lake including Pectoral and Least Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher and Franklin's Gull.

On Saturday April 29 at 7 a.m. meet at the Marietta American Legion, located one block west of the intersection of County Road 7 and State Highway 40, 11 miles west of Madison. Coffee, sweet rolls, juice and milk will be available for purchase. Guided car caravans will leave between 7 and 8 am. At noon stop back at the Legion for barbecue sandwiches (available at a modest cost), compare notes and continue afternoon birding. A Saturday chicken dinner for \$10, will be served at 7:30 pm at the Sons of Norway Hall on Highway 75 in Madison. Reservations are necessary for dinner; please contact Julie Claflin by email at JulieClaflin@gmail.com. After dinner there will be a short program and then the species count for the day will be recorded.

Local lodging is available at Lou's Lodge in Madison 320-598-7518, the Vali Vu Motel in Ortonville 320-839-2558, Prairie Waters Inn in Appleton 320-289-2500, and the Country Inn by Carlson in Montevideo 320-269-8000. Free camping is available at Prairie Marsh Farm, 1770 151st Ave, Marietta, located 7 miles west of US 75 and 1.5 miles south of 212. Contact Ken Larson for more information or to reserve a camping site - home (Minnetonka) 952-595-9265, cell 612-210-8486 or email to priariemarshfarm@comcast.net



Our Greatest Resource

*By Don Arnosti, Conservation Program Director
Izaak Walton League*

Minnesota's greatest natural resource is our water. We bird lovers know this just by looking at the list of waterfowl, shorebirds and other water-loving organisms that make our clean waters their home. We know that not all our water is in good condition – with most streams and lakes in southern and western Minnesota polluted by run-off from farms and urban areas.

But our lakes “Up North” are in great shape, right? Right.

We know that excessive lakeshore development and leaky septic systems can lead to recurring cycles of algae bloom and die-off, harming fish (and the birds that eat them) and making swimming unpleasant, at the least. There are things that each of us who are stewards of a stretch of lakeshore can and should resolve on our own property: update your septic system and maintain a healthy buffer of native vegetation between any dwelling and a lake or river.

But what about our public lakes and rivers in national and state forest lands? What about Lake Superior and the Boundary Waters Wilderness?

These waters are perhaps most at risk from centuries of toxic pollution from a new form of mining, for copper and nickel. These mines (PolyMet, Twin Metals and others) would expose square miles of sulfide bearing waste rock to air and water, leaching toxic metals into our waters for centuries to come. Perhaps you heard about the recent kill of over 3000 migrating geese in the toxic waters of a similar mine in Butte, Montana?

Action Needed Now: Sign a petition to the US Forest Service to continue the recent effort to suspend leasing of federal minerals in the Boundary Waters watershed, while a study of potential impacts of sulfide ore mining to the wilderness is conducted. You can find a petition to sign on the home page of the Minnesota Izaak Walton League (minnesotaiques.org) the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters, and many others.

Take the time to inform yourself and participate in other decisions by DNR about the PolyMet proposed mine. Be sure the Governor and state legislators are fully informed about your concern for our water!



Minnesota River Valley
Audubon Chapter
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FIELD TRIPS – join us. All trips are free unless otherwise noted.

Beginning birders are welcome on all field trips:

International Festival of Owls Lots of kids and adult activities March 3-5, 2017 in Houston, MN. For more info visit the festival website www.festivalofowls.com or call the Houston Nature Center 507-896-6957

MN Valley Nat'l Wildlife Refuge Bird Watching

Bass Ponds = 2325 E 86th St. Bloomington

Rapids Lake = 15865 Carver Highland Dr, Carver

Saturday, March 4, 8:00 am, Bass Ponds

Monday, March 13, 8:00 am, Bass Ponds

Monday, March 20, 8:00 am, Rapids Lake

Saturday, March 25, 8:00 am, Bass Ponds

Sunday, April 2, 8am, Bass Ponds

Tuesday, April 11, 8:00am, Rapids Lake

Monday, April 24, 8:00am, Rapids Lake

Join us for a bird walk on one of the many refuge units and learn about the birds that migrate to and through Minnesota. We will search for migrating waterfowl and raptors and we should also get to see some early spring migrants with a mix of sparrows and the first Yellow-rumped Warblers of the season. Birders of all skill levels are welcome on these walks. Bring your binoculars, favorite field guide and dress appropriately for the weather. Craig Mandel 952-240-7647, Volunteer Refuge Naturalist

Southeastern Minnesota Birding Days

Thursday, Friday, April 6 – 7, 2017, 7:00 am

Craig Mandel 952-240-7647

\$35/non-MRVAC members; \$25/MRVAC members

We will spend time birding in Mower and Fillmore Counties. Some of the locations we may explore include the Hormel Nature Center, Forestville State park, some WMA's and a few sewage ponds. With luck, we'll see early warblers, sparrows, waterfowl and some other spring migrants. Please contact Craig to register for this trip.

Isanti County Birding Day

Thursday, April 13, 2017, 6:30 am

Craig Mandel 952-240-7647

This field trip will explore the varied habitat that Isanti County has to offer. Some of the locations we may visit include Springvale, Wayside Prairie and Vegsund Family Park. We will be checking some of the bigger lakes for waterfowl and grebes. With luck we'll see some early migrant songbirds and a nice mix of waterfowl. Please contact Craig to register for this trip.

Bird Banding Programs at Lowry

Saturday, March 18 9:00 am – noon

Saturday April 22, 9:00 am - noon, free

Lowry Nature Center in Carver Park Reserve

7025 Victoria Drive, Victoria, MN 55386

See banders working with live songbirds. You will have an opportunity to see these wonderful birds up close and may even get the opportunity to release one. Visit www.threeriversparks.org for more info.

Maple Syrup Day ACNW, Sandstone MN

Saturday, March 18, 2017

As winter gives way to spring, the sap starts flowing in the maple trees. That's maple syrup time at the Audubon Center! Come join us for our annual Maple Syrup Day - a pancake brunch and hands-on maple syrup program. You will learn which trees in the woods are maple trees, and the history and process of making maple syrup. Then, help us will tap some maple trees, collect and haul sap and observe the sap being processed into liquid gold maple syrup. Reservations required – call 888-404-7743 or email audubon1@audubon-center.org to make reservations.

Salt Lake Weekend 2017 Saturday, April 29, 2017

More information on page 5 & <http://moumn.org/saltlake/>